



## PUBLIC HEALTH LAW

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

Law has made an indispensable contribution to the great public health achievements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet it has not kept pace with evolving public health challenges:

- The Nation's *Healthy People 2010* report concludes that "many laws, rules, regulations and ordinances pertaining to public health are outdated."
- Public health practitioners, public policy makers, and the legal community have limited access to training to learn how to use their legal authorities effectively.
- Information about "best practices" in designing and implementing legal tools is not readily available.

### WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC created the Public Health Law Program in 2000 to stimulate a national initiative to upgrade public health's legal tools. An integral component of CDC's strategy to strengthen the Nation's public health infrastructure, the Program helps build the capacity of state and local health departments and other partners to use law to advance the public's health. The Program conducts applied research on effective public health laws, develops law-related training opportunities for public health professionals, and provides an active forum for partnerships and collaborations.

*Example of program in action:* Recognizing the potential threat of bioterrorism, the CDC Public Health Law Program in April 2001 convened a conference that developed a consensus statement of the legal powers health agencies should have to respond to actual attacks. In response to the terrorist attacks of September and October 2001, the Program stimulated rapid development of the Draft Model State Health Emergencies Act as a checklist for states to use to review their existing statutory authorities. Many states used it for that purpose almost immediately and, as of February 2002, nearly one-half of all the states had considered some form of legislative action to improve those powers.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

In 2002 the CDC Public Health Law Program will: assist states in reviewing their public health emergency legal powers; develop training in effective use of public health emergency powers; initiate national training in the practical use of public health laws for public health purposes; and hold the national conference "The Public's Health and the Law in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" in partnership with 14 leading organizations in public health and law and three national foundations.

*For information about this or other CDC programs, visit [www.cdc.gov/programs](http://www.cdc.gov/programs).*

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